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Stewart, Kenneth A.

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Cyber Warriors Professional Association Another Sign of Evolving Battlefield

Article By: Kenneth A. Stewart

A Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) student, U.S. Army Capt. Joseph Billingsley of Stamford, Conn., is building the military's first cyber warfare professionals association.

The Military Cyber Professionals Association (MCPA), soon to be launched from Monterey, Calif., where Billingsley is currently studying for his master and doctoral degrees, will provide a professional home for the burgeoning cyber operations community. The association's Monterey chapter will be both a prototype and the association's flagship as it branches out to build a national organization.

"Monterey is a natural home for the association due to its proximity to NPS, DLI [Defense Language Institute], Silicon Valley, other defense personnel, and the interest in cyber initiatives," said Billingsley.

In a recent visit to NPS, U.S. Cyber Command Deputy Commander, Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Jon M. Davis, also recognized the area's commitment to cyber operations research and for its contribution to the creation of a community of cyber professionals.

"We are going to need 6,000 people in the next three years to build a cyber force ... I know that those people live here [at NPS]," said Davis.

"The cyber domain matters because the prosperity and security of our nation depends on it," said Billingsley. "It's hard to imagine a single American business or military unit that does not rely on connectivity to accomplish at least some of its core functions. That trend is not expected to change any time soon."

Billingsley, an Army strategist with a background in signal intelligence, was selected by the U.S. Army's Cyber Command to pursue graduate cyber operations studies at NPS. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in cyber systems and operations, and a Ph.D. in information sciences.

"The Army cyber command gave me the opportunity to earn a cyber master's degree here at NPS that met our needs," said Billingsley. "Most cyber programs are more technical and seek to produce operators, but NPS' cyber systems and operations degree is perfect for me because it is a balance between strategy and technical scholarship."

Billingsley's graduate work revealed the need for a cyber association to bring together myriad professionals pioneering work in the cyber operations field. Professional military associations, like the one envisioned by Billingsley, provide a venue for military professionals to share lessons-learned and recognize each other's achievements. They also serve a social role, offering camaraderie and fellowship to highly-specialized groups that share jargon and experiences often foreign to those outside their communities.



Army Capt. Joseph Billingsley of Stamford Conn. meets with the Association of Old Crows President, retired Air Force Lt. Col. Wayne Shaw. The Old Crows is an international association electronic warfare profession. Billingsley met with Shaw at the NPS' Center for Cyber Warfare (CCW).



Deputy Commander of the U.S. Cyber Command, Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Jon M. Davis, speaks to students at the Naval Postgraduate School about the importance of counter cyber-warfare research. Davis called upon researchers to answer to explore the cyber domain.

MCPA hopes to recruit members from diverse cyber related backgrounds. As the cyber community continues to evolve, its connection with disciplines not traditionally linked to the cyber domain continues to increase.

"I did not want to get caught up with debates about hard boundaries of who is or who is not a cyber warrior because we are all still trying to determine what a cyber warrior looks like and where they fit in military operations," said Billingsley. "Theories about cyber warfare are not well developed yet. An association that includes a journal and various venues for dialogue may help inform discussions at every echelon."

Billingsley envisions an association that will encourage professional and social activity amongst its members, grant awards, support youth science and volunteering efforts, and encourage educational initiatives. Despite its infancy, association members have already begun outreach activities on the Monterey Peninsula that they hope will encourage future interest in cyberspace.

"The association has already begun a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) outreach program encouraging members to get involved by leveraging existing local initiatives like the Coder Dojo, supported by the Steinbeck Innovation Cluster, and the Cyber Adventures Program supported by NPS' Cebrowski Institute," said institute director and NPS Department of Computer Science Chair, Dr. Peter Denning.

"The MCPA outreach program provides access to enthusiastic and skilled technologists in order to better prepare youths for an increasingly interconnected world," added MCPA STEM Outreach Coordinator David Steinberg. "We offer curricula, trainings, and facilitate partnerships with entities that share our priorities. Our members span many disciplines and are determined to help raise the next generation of cyber professionals."

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